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ABSTRACT

This manual presents guidelines for supervisors of employees with learning disabilities. Guidelines were developed from both the author's supervisory experience and from a research study surveying employers to identify support systems and techniques to enable supervisors to work more effectively with these employees. The survey, which included 65 complete questionnaires and 27 personal interviews, identified problems that this population experiences, including low self esteem, insecurity, inability to follow directions, distractibility, perseveration, and limited social skills. Principles underlying effective supervisory strategies emerged, including: (1) proper job placement is the first step to successful employment; (2) the supervisor should be committed to training and hiring people with special needs for the work force; (3) specialized supervisory skills are needed; and (4) deficits can be converted into assets. Specific supervisory strategies are listed, divided into two groups: first, general techniques for working with employees with learning disabilities and, second, specific problem behaviors and strategies for handling them. The final section addresses qualities of the on-site supervisor which contribute to effective job performance by the employee with learning disabilities and sources of supervisory consultation and support for the supervisor. (DB)

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GUIDELINES for

Supervising Employees with Learning Disabilities

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

BACKGROUND FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE GUIDELINES 1

JOB PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES 3

STRATEGIES FOR SUPERVISION 5

1. General Techniques for Working with Employees with LD 6

   A. Preparations supervisor should make before employee starts to work 6
   B. Welcoming techniques for beginning the work experience 7
   C. On-going supervisory techniques 8
   D. Strategies to use in supervisory conferences 9

2. Specific Problem Behaviors and Strategies for Handling Them 10

   A. Insecurity about role on the job and low self-esteem 10
   B. Memory problems and inability to follow directions 11
   C. Distractibility and short attention span 12
   D. Inability to transfer learning 12
   E. Reluctance to ask for information or for help 12
   F. Lack of initiative 12
   G. Perseveration and impulsivity 13
   H. Lack of social skills (shyness) 14
   I. Lack of social skills (inappropriate responses) 14
   J. Behaving as a service recipient rather than a service provider 14
   K. Poor judgment in regard to safety issues 15

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL SUPERVISION 15

1. Qualities of the on-site supervisor which contribute to effective job performance by the employee with learning disabilities 15
2. Sources of supervisory consultation and suggestions for implementing support for the on-site supervisor 16

CONCLUSION 18

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 19

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES 20

INTRODUCTION

Public awareness of the special needs of individuals with disabilities has increased in recent years. Changes such as ramps and special toilet facilities have been made to accommodate the more obvious needs. However, there are difficulties in daily living tasks and at the work place which are not so widely recognized. The needs of individuals with learning disabilities fall into this category.

People with learning disabilities may have one or more of the following characteristics: poor reading and/or math skills, difficulty with written and/or verbal communication, inability to abstract and generalize, and social immaturity. Because people with learning disabilities do not look different from the general population and their disabilities are not readily visible, they are often expected to function at a level higher than their skills would warrant. This sometimes leads to misinterpretation of problem behaviors. What makes identification complex is the fact that many have chosen not to disclose their limitations because they are ashamed or fear that they would not be hired.

It is estimated that 10-15% of employees in any large organization have some characteristics of learning disabilities. With the implementation of the American with Disabilities Act 1990 more of this population will enter the workplace. It is hoped that this manual will help employers and supervisors to identify workers with learning disabilities so that a better understanding of their needs may lead to more successful employment for all concerned.

BACKGROUND FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines were originally developed as an outcome of a research study I conducted in Spring 1990 during a sabbatical leave from the Threshold Program at Lesley College, Cambridge, MA. The purpose of the study (Reisman, 1990; Reisman & Reisman, 1993) was to identify support systems for supervisors of people with learning disabilities who function in the low average IQ range in training internships and employment situations. Work-related issues and techniques of support which enable supervisors to work more effectively with these trainees and employees were evaluated.

It should be noted that people with learning disabilities represent a wide range of functioning. Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison, with high IQ's, had learning disabilities. However, the population targeted in my research project was people with the general learning disabilities characteristics listed above as

well as low average intelligence. Some other characteristics which occur in this population are **short attention span, distractibility, information processing deficits, memory problems, perseveration and inappropriate social responses**. Any one individual in the population might demonstrate a scatter of abilities and levels of functioning. It is possible for a person with learning disabilities to have excellent social skills, but be low in cognitive abilities.

These guidelines were developed based on information from two main sources:

(1) Supervisory Experience: I have worked for eleven years at the Threshold Program training students with learning disabilities who function in the low average IQ range and supporting the supervisory work of staff members of cooperating agencies providing field placements.

The Threshold Program is a two-year program for learning disabled young adults in the low-average intellectual range. Located on a college campus, the program strives to prepare its students (ages 18-24) for independent living through an academic and vocational curriculum based on a hands-on approach. Students divide their time between specially designed campus based courses and vocational experiences supervised by Threshold faculty and on-site supervisors working in community agencies. Students may choose to prepare for work with young children in early childhood settings, with adults in such settings as nursing homes or geriatric day centers, or for clerical jobs in business or industry. An optional third-year program is geared to aid students as they make the transition to greater independence in paid work experiences and living on their own.

(2) Research Study: The vocational faculty of the Threshold Program perceived a need for further clarification of supervisory issues and the development of guidelines which would be helpful in supporting the work of the on-site field supervisors with whom we cooperate. It was presumed that employers would also find such guidelines helpful. Thus, I conducted a research project to identify on-the-job problems for this population and techniques used by the field supervisors to address these problems.

Questionnaires were sent to Threshold cooperating supervisors and employers of Threshold graduates, mostly in the human service professions. Interviews were conducted with employers and supervisors (not connected with Threshold) in business and industry. A total of 65 completed questionnaires and 27 personal interviews, plus a review of the literature, form the basis of the findings of the study. Results of the study

identified problems this population experiences at work and techniques which could be useful to supervisors in helping them to improve their job performance. (Further details are available in the research report; all further references to "research" refer to Reisman, 1990).

JOB PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

People with learning disabilities are often **dependable, loyal** employees who can be counted on to be at work on time. They are **eager to please** and to do a good job. Some of them like to do jobs that are repetitive. Because of the uncertainty about their abilities, they are **receptive to directions** from supervisors in addressing their job responsibilities. In a similar vein they can constructively handle criticism about their work performance, particularly if the supervisor takes the time to explain what is expected and shows respect for them as individuals.

Problems occur on the job because of **insecurity about their role at work**. They have **low self-esteem** and question whether they have the capacity to fulfill expectations others have of them, and/or whether they can be of importance to the organization. Even with clear explanations and reassurance from supervisors, they often present problems because of their low self-concept.

Their **insecurity** prevents them from asking questions about their role and specific tasks. In the face of uncertainty, the typical response is avoidance -- to retreat rather than to ask for help or redirection. They feel unworthy or "stupid" and fear that if they are more assertive, their ignorance will show and might cause the loss of their job.

Following directions is sometimes difficult. Often this is seen as a memory problem. Another perspective on the **inability to follow directions** is that they may hear or read directions, but do not process them. There appears to be a gap between what they hear or read and their capacity to act upon this information. Frequently, people with learning disabilities say that they have trouble remembering, when perhaps they have not understood in the first place.

For some, **distractibility** and having a **short attention span** are major problems. External noise or competing activity exacerbates this tendency and takes their attention away from the task at hand. Expecting them to focus for too long a time tests the limits of their attention span. Fidgeting, moving around and then, perhaps returning to the task, is a typical sequence for those who are easily distracted.

Perseveration, the repetition of comments and/or subjects for discussion, is a problem for some people with learning disabilities. This behavior, coupled with an **inability to read verbal and non-verbal cues** leads to the impulsive interrupting of conversations to relate what is upper most on the person's mind. Other people are put off by the repetition of comments or ideas which often seem trivial or inappropriate and are annoyed at being interrupted.

People with learning disabilities may have **difficulty generalizing** from one situation to another; they tend to be rigid. Even when they have been given sanction to be flexible, the fear of erring prevents them from making a judgment which veers from the rule. In the human service fields, especially, this rigidity is problematic because the behavior of children and clients is less predictable than the tasks that are more typical in business or industry. Exercising good judgment when working with people in the human service setting is particularly important as it applies to issues of health and safety. Part of the job responsibility in the human services is making sure that the children and clients are well cared for.

Judgments in regard to their own personal health is also an issue. In their zeal to do well on the job, they are apt to come to work when ill, jeopardizing their own health and that of others in the work place.

In some respects, the **lack of good judgment** is a reflection of their immaturity and dependency needs. When working in human service agencies, some identify more as service recipients than as service providers. For example, some trainees have been observed to participate in activities as though they were children rather than the adult responsible for the care of the children.

Limited social skills often cause tension at work with other employees. Eagerness to make friends may lead to misinterpretation of everyday social interaction as an invitation for a closer friendship. Co-workers often shun or scapegoat the worker with learning disabilities because of their awkwardness socially. Fellow employees also become impatient and critical when someone else's workpace or style is different from theirs. Retreat, less adequate job performance, or angry outbursts may be the response of the employee with learning disabilities.

A number of characteristics of learning disabilities have been identified which present problems in job performance: **poor self-image, insecurity, distractibility, short attention span, impulsivity, perseveration, rigidity, immaturity, poor judgment and limited social skills**. This may appear as a daunting list of deficits, as it relates to the individual's potential performance in a work situation. But, it is only as one begins with an understanding of this population that it is possible to define guidelines which will result in viable

employment experiences. Several principles emerge which underlie the supervisory strategies which follow. These principles are:

- **Proper job placement is the first step to successful employment**: Job placement needs careful consideration for any employee, but especially for those in this population. Characteristically there is a scatter in their abilities. People with learning disabilities could be strong in one area and weak in others, but because their deficits are not immediately obvious, they are often expected to function at a level higher than their capabilities warrant. Thus, they may experience frustration and disappointment. More appropriate assignments can take place if the employer and/or supervisor are aware of the particular strengths and weaknesses of the individual.

- **The supervisor should be committed to training and hiring people with special needs for the work force**: The supervisor is a key ingredient in successful employment, yet not all supervisors or department heads are suited for this role. People deciding to supervise this population need the conviction that they can be integrated into the work force and can be valuable employees.

- **Specialized supervisory skills are needed**: Many of the same techniques used to supervise people with special needs are useful for the general population. However, some techniques are used more frequently with this population and are applied differently. A fuller discussion follows in the section outlining strategies.

- **Deficits can be converted into assets**: For example, perseveration, which on one level is problematic to co-workers and supervisors, on another level can be beneficial to the enterprise. In fact, it may be appropriate to assign repetitive tasks which might be tedious for someone else, to the worker who perseverates.

STRATEGIES FOR SUPERVISION

The supervisory strategies in this guidebook focus on social/behavioral issues rather than on deficits in the basic skills of reading, writing, and math. This is not to imply that those areas are less of a problem for people with learning disabilities; however, there is an extensive literature addressing remediation in those areas. (Houck, 1984; Lerner, 1985). Guidelines for addressing social/behavioral issues on the job are less prevalent, so priority is given to outlining supervisory strategies for handling those problems.

The guidelines are divided into two sections:

1. General techniques for working with employees with learning disabilities.

2. Specific problem behaviors and strategies for handling them.

1. General techniques for working with employees with learning disabilities.

A. **Preparations supervisor should make before employee starts to work**:

- Try to learn as much as possible about learning disabilities and other characteristics of people with moderate special needs.

- Gather as much information as possible about the individual to be supervised from the referring agency, former teachers or employers and the person him or herself.

- Meet with the individual. Ask him or her to identify:

  - abilities, limitations and special needs
  - coping strategies
  - concept of the job
  - goals and aspirations
  - experience in work situations
  - interests and hobbies

  (Some individuals will be able to come forth with all or most of the information; others will need prodding and may not be able to offer much information).

- Explain beginning expectations. Tell the employee what can be expected of you. Try to relate your expectations to what the person has told you about him or herself. Reassure the person that everyone has some apprehension about starting a new experience, and that you are ready to make changes in expectations when necessary.

- Set up a regular time to meet. Explain that this time is set aside to give both of you the opportunity to plan together and to practice some work skills which need reinforcing. Job successes and necessary modifications in tasks and behaviors can be discussed in this regularly scheduled meeting time. The meeting time offers a

less threatening atmosphere for ongoing evaluation than conferences called when problems arise.

B. **Welcoming techniques for beginning the work experience**:

People with learning disabilities often feel unsure that they are really wanted at the job site even when they are hired with full knowledge of their disabilities. Low self-esteem makes them question their worth to the job situation. To help them handle this initial apprehension (which is also not uncommon in the general population) the following techniques can be helpful:

- Welcome the new employee by introducing him or her in the agency or company news bulletin.
- Include the person's name on the list of staff or employees of the firm where this is done for others.
- Personally introduce the new employee to staff, employees, clients or others in the environment.
- Make getting acquainted easier by giving the individual a list of the names of other employees, children or clients with whom he or she will be working. In a day care or human service agency, put name tags on the children or clients.
- Meet the individual's basic needs: designate a place to put personal belongings; point out toilet and eating facilities; include him or her in lunch with other staff if at all possible.
- Explain rules of the work place: clarify procedures for absence, tardiness, emergencies. Give the worker a written list of the rules.
- Make available a calendar of events relevant to the job.
- Explain, write out and post any pertinent routines or schedules.
- Write out specific job responsibilities expected of the employee. Post the list in a place that is easily accessible.
- Take the new employee on a tour of the work place making sure to point out the location of supplies that the person may be required to secure.

C. **On-going supervisory techniques**:

- Break tasks down into specific small steps. Give directions both orally and in writing. Show how to do the task; then ask the person to do the task in front of you.

- Limit directions to one at a time until you see evidence that the person can function with greater autonomy. In any case, have the individual repeat the directions to you to be sure that he or she understood.

- Encourage the asking of questions for clarification of tasks or for other information.

- Encourage the person to tell you when things are difficult, when he or she is uncomfortable about a job expectation and/or when there is a problem with co-workers.

- Speak clearly. Be aware of your tone of voice and body posture. Try to make requests and suggestions rather than commands.

- Give immediate feedback as problems arise. Avoid letting minor issues escalate into major problems.

- Remember to praise even small improvements in performance or behavior.

- In redirecting or giving critical feedback, try to start with a positive statement before suggesting a change in the job behavior, whether for a specific job task or for a social skill.

- Keep expectations realistic: periodically remind yourself to re-assess expectations. Be careful about underestimating as well as overestimating abilities.

- Do some "detective work" to ascertain whether a problem which has occurred may be attributable to characteristic behavior of people with learning disabilities, whether the expectations are too high or too low for this individual, or whether you as the supervisor are losing patience or perspective.

- Be patient: People with learning disabilities need much repetition and time to process information.

- Whenever possible, anticipate and prepare the person for changes which are likely to occur in routines or schedules.

- Include individuals with learning disabilities in meetings even if you think that they may not comprehend the content of the meeting. Similarly, invite them to social events so that they feel a part of the organization.

- Show an interest in the individual's personal life, but be cautious about getting too involved. A friendly interest is enough. Many people with learning disabilities are "hungry" for personal relationships and are not aware of appropriate boundaries. You may have to set limits for the sake of both of you.

- Set a tone of respect by modelling behavior toward all employees that clearly sends the message of the value you place on each person's role in the organization. Make clear that unkind behavior is not acceptable.

Remember: supervising people with learning disabilities demands time, patience, repetition and compassion. In general, be honest, specific, respectful, and give lots of kudos.

D. **Strategies to use in supervisory conferences**:

- Designate a regular time for a minimum of fifteen uninterrupted minutes each week to talk with the supervisee.

- Encourage the person to keep a journal or notebook in which to jot things down to discuss with you at your regular meetings.

- Encourage the use of the journal as a way to self-evaluate. Suggest that entries might include something that the supervisee feels good about or something that he or she wants to work on. Suggest that the journal also be used to describe something that happened at work which the individual wants to discuss or to write ways in which you could be helpful.

- Invite ideas and try to use them. Sometimes people with learning disabilities are able to suggest different ways that you can supervise or give instructions which are more compatible with their style of learning.

- Role play situations which have occurred. If possible, tape or video the role play. This technique often helps to dramatize a point you want to make and affords the opportunity to discuss issues. Encourage the employee to watch him or herself in a mirror while talking or acting out a situation. This heightens awareness of non-verbal behaviors. Some people are not comfortable with role playing, being taped or using a mirror. Suggest these techniques only after you have gained the trust of your supervisee.

- Practice a job skill or behavioral change in the supervisory conference i.e., limiting an acting-out child, starting a conversation, or answering the telephone. Practice within the supportive supervisory relationship, detached from the more stressful work situation, makes learning new behaviors easier.

- Establish goals for job skills and behavioral changes, measure progress toward goals, and set new ones. Break down long-term goals into smaller achievable steps.

- Be realistic in discussing skills and deficits. Be prepared with suggestions for strategies to cope with problem areas. For example: for someone who has a reversal problem, putting shoes on the correct feet of a child may be difficult. Suggest that the person sit behind the child, line up the shoes next to the correct feet and then go in front to put them on. By seeing the shoes from the perspective the person is accustomed to, he or she does not have to deal with the issue of reversal.

2. Specific Problem Behaviors and Strategies for Handling Them

This section identifies specific problem behaviors and suggests strategies for handling them. The core strategies are repeated for some problems because they are particularly useful in coping with the behavior. Some techniques are suitable to use for a variety of problems; thus, in some instances problems are grouped together.

A. **Insecurity about role on the job and low self-esteem**

- Welcome and orient the new employee to the job using the techniques suggested for beginning the relationship.

- Plan tasks that are meaningful and allow the individual to experience success, thereby enhancing his or her sense of worth.

- Look for opportunities to give positive reinforcement for even small steps in improvement. Be specific about what you are praising. In addition to saying "You are doing a good job", say, "I really appreciated that you remembered to put paper towels in the bathroom today when we ran out." or "The envelopes look very neat. You put the stamps on in exactly the top right hand corner."

- When suggesting changes in behavior, use the "sandwich technique". Start with a positive, explain the criticism, and give a specific suggestion for a way to improve the behavior. For example, "I really like the way you greet people who have an appointment with me, but when you come back late from your break, I feel annoyed because I am depending on you for coverage. Please be sure that you stay near enough during your break, so that you can return on time."

B. **Memory problems and inability to follow directions**:

- When giving directions, check to make sure that the person is looking at you or at what you are demonstrating so as to assure that he or she is focusing on the instructions.

- Give step-by-step instructions both orally and in writing. Where applicable, use color coding or draw the instructions. Post the written or graphic instructions next to where the employee will be using them.

- Ask the person to repeat the instructions to you or demonstrate the task while you watch. Encourage questions.

- Be specific in giving directions: i.e. "Wipe all three tables in this room with the sponge that is on the sink in the kitchen." or "Put these two boxes on the table next to the water cooler."

- Give only as many directions as the individual can handle at any one time.

- Use a checklist of written or graphic directions to facilitate self-monitoring.

- To aid memory, suggest key phrases or mnemonic associations.
- Suggest imaging: "Close your eyes and picture each step of your task."

C. **Distractibility and short attention span**:

- Assign job tasks that allow for movement. If that is not possible, suggest that the person take a stretch or short walk after working a set amount of time.
- Try to assign tasks that can be completed in short periods of time.
- Assign the person to work in locations that are devoid of distractions such as excess noise, movements or activities.
- Develop signals, such as a friendly tap on the shoulder, to alert the person to stay on task.

D. **Inability to transfer learning**:

- Permit the person to "shadow" you as you demonstrate how a particular learning can be used in different situations.
- Use role play in supervisory meetings to give the supervisee practice in making judgments in a variety of situations.

E. **Reluctance to ask for information or for help**:

- Require the person to ask one question each day. If it is difficult for the person to do it verbally, suggest that he or she begin by writing it out. If writing is hard, suggest the use of a tape recorder. Gradually require direct verbal contact.
- Praise the person when he or she asks for information or help.

F. **Lack of initiative**:

- Give the person a list of tasks that can be done without further help from the supervisor.

- Identify situations in which you expect the employee to take initiative, i.e. "When you see children playing on the slide and there are no adults around, go to the slide to supervise." or "When the supply of paper next to the Xerox machine is low, go to the supply cabinet for more."

- Offer praise immediately when initiative is taken.

- Role play tasks or situations occurring on the job in which the person might take an initiative.

G. **Perseveration and impulsivity**:

- In supervisory meetings, point out instances when the supervisee has perseverated and/or been impulsive and how these behaviors get in the way of the job or are annoying to other people. Work out signals to alert the person when he or she is being impulsive or perseverating.

- When these problems occur on the job, the supervisor should immediately identify the behaviors, being careful to avoid embarrassing the employee in front of others. Use the agreed upon signal, such as a wink, to remind the person that this is the behavior to stop.

- Suggest that when the individual feels the urge to repeat or to interrupt that he or she should write out the comment or say it to him or herself.

- Suggest counting to ten before speaking or acting. During that time, the person should assess whether he or she has already made the comment and whether this is an appropriate time to talk.

- Discuss appropriate times for talking with you and set ground rules for what issues might take priority and what issues can wait for regularly scheduled meetings.

- In supervisory meetings, practice identifying the meaning of non-verbal and verbal cues so that the supervisee can be more aware of when he or she is interrupting.

H. **Lack of social skills (shyness)**:

- Ask the employee to make up a list of people with whom he or she feels comfortable. Establish, as a task, that the individual talk with one person on the list each day. This is particularly helpful in human service settings where interaction with children or adults is crucial to functioning on the job.

- Discuss ways to open a conversation. Role play conversations.

- Write out suggestions of conversational gambits such as, "What is your job here?" that the employee might use.

I. **Lack of social skills (inappropriate responses)**

- Give immediate feedback when the employee is behaving in an inappropriate way (try not to embarrass the individual in front of others).

- In your supervisory meeting, discuss observed situations, and suggest more socially acceptable responses. Role play these alternative behaviors.

- Enlist the aid of an understanding co-worker who might befriend and mentor the employee with learning disabilities.

J. **Behaving as a service recipient rather than a service provider**:

- Give immediate feedback when the employee is behaving as a service recipient (i.e. helping him or herself to refreshments before the children or clients; requesting extra break time; avoiding tasks).

- Role play in supervisory meetings the appropriate responses for providing services.

- Acknowledge appropriate behavior when it occurs.

- Look for opportunities to meet the nurturing needs expressed by the person with special needs.

K. **Poor judgment in regard to safety issues**:

- Point out possible dangerous situations at work. Spell out appropriate responses.
- Role play what to do in an emergency.
- Clarify the importance of good health and safety practices for all concerned, including the employee.

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL SUPERVISION

Findings from the research study on the supervision of people with special needs in the work place indicate that the direct on-site supervisor is a key ingredient for successful employment. An important supplemental finding of the research is that the supervisor's effectiveness is significantly enhanced when he or she receives supervisory support.

This concluding section of the guidebook addresses the following interrelated aspects of supervision:

1. Qualities of the on-site supervisor which contribute to effective job performance by the employee with learning disabilities.
2. Sources of supervisory consultation and suggestions for implementing support for the on-site supervisor.

1. <u>Qualities of the on-site supervisor which contribute to effective job performance by the employee with learning disabilities</u>.

- Personal commitment to the principle of training and hiring people with limitations.
- Confidence in his or her own general supervisory abilities and particularly, feeling a measure of success in efforts to help the person with special needs.
- Willingness to invest extra time, patience, and energy to understand and respond to the needs of these employees.

- Desire to learn techniques which will help the employee to function more effectively.

- Readiness to be flexible about expectations and job tasks.

- Ability to respect others for whatever their strengths or weaknesses might be.

2. Sources of supervisory consultation and suggestions for implementing support for the on-site supervisor.

Respondents to the research study universally indicated the need for supervisory consultation for the on-site supervisor. Several different models came to light in the study. One model is the vocational/educational model combining academic courses with practical experience exemplified by the Threshold Program. Course work is integrated with on-site experiences. On-site supervisors receive direction for the work of the trainee and supervisory support from the training institution.

Trainees referred for employment from vocational rehabilitation agencies are accompanied by a coach who gradually phases out as the trainee is able to function more independently. This training coach may be permanently assigned to the site to train new people and, thus, is available for consultation with company supervisors even after the trainee becomes a full employee.

Some companies have affirmative action officers, human resource managers, and/or personnel officers who serve in the capacity of consultants to department heads and supervisors.

Providing emotional support as well as specific information about special needs to the on-site supervisor are aspects of the role of the supervisory consultant which enable the on-site supervisor to work more effectively with employees with learning disabilities.

The following are suggestions the supervisory consultant might implement to support the on-site supervisor:

- Provide information about the characteristics of people with special needs.

- Interpret the needs which are specific to the particular trainee or employee.

- Identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of the individual.
- Help the supervisor to set realistic goals based on knowledge of the individual employee.
- Give specific information about techniques which work in particular situations.
- Set up regular meetings or phone contact with the supervisor to discuss progress and strategies for helping the employee.
- Be available to the employee for feedback so that you can get perspective from both sides when issues arise.
- Establish times for observing the worker on the job.
- Schedule three-way meetings in which there is self-evaluation from the employee as well as feedback from you and the supervisor.
- Use the meetings as a way of demonstrating to the supervisor techniques of working with the person with learning disabilities.
- Be available for crisis intervention.
- Offer suggestions for changes in supervisory behavior when needed.
- Offer emotional support: praise the supervisor for appropriate efforts as well as offering empathy for frustrations.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of qualities of the on-site supervisor and the nature of supervisory consultation suggest that good intentions and positive feelings of supervisors are more effective when backed up with specific information about the needs of people with learning disabilities and some emotional support. This parallels the technique used to help the employee with learning disabilities to function more effectively. People with special needs function better when they are offered support and consideration in the form of flexible expectations and immediate feedback along with very specific instruction.

We know that, in general, people function better and with greater security when expectations are clearly defined and offered with a bit of TLC (tender loving care!). Initially this may appear as a truism, but it is important to highlight in the context of designing policy and supervisory techniques for working with the special needs population.

Individuals with learning disabilities can make a significant contribution to the work force when properly supervised. It is heartening to find increased awareness for this long hidden and under-served population. As we grow in understanding their needs and ways to enhance their functioning, more programs of supervision could be designed. All indications are that people with learning disabilities and other moderate special needs are an untapped resource for the labor pool.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elaine S. Reisman is Assistant Professor and Early Childhood Coordinator at the Threshold Program at Lesley College in Cambridge, MA. She is responsible for training young adults with moderate special needs for positions as aides in early childhood centers. Ms. Reisman holds a BA in Education from Antioch College in Ohio and an MEd from Lesley College where she majored in special education. Among her past experiences are teaching and administrative positions in regular and special education settings for young children. At the college level she has taught courses in regular and special education and supervised internships at Wheelock, Mt. Ida, and Emerson Colleges. Staff supervision, communication with parents, and discipline are among the topics on which she lectures and conducts workshops with parents and staff of early childhood centers in the USA, Israel, and Australia. Publications include related articles. Her research study on the supervision of people with special needs in the work force resulted in several published articles and a booklet "Guidelines for Supervising Employees with Learning Disabilities." She has conducted workshops on supervision not only in the greater Boston area but also in Australia, England, South Africa, and Brazil.

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RESOURCES

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
412-341-1515

National Center for Learning Disabilities
381 Park Avenue South Suite 1420
New York, NY 10016
212-545-7510

President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped
1111 20th Street, NY
Room 660
Washington, DC 20036
202-653-5022